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# LETTERS

## WELCOMING CARERS ON TO THE WARDS

# Partnership between healthcare staff and carers on wards

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Jennings and Oliver's correspondence illuminates tensions inherent in carer involvement in secondary care.<sup>1 2</sup> The knowledge and experience of carers provides essential continuity of care, yet for some carers, admission provides a welcome and much needed break.

The active involvement of carers requires both them and hospital staff—with differentiated expertise and expectations—to understand, appreciate, and work together for the best interests of patients. Sounds simple, but our research on supporting staff to partner with carers of older people in acute hospitals suggests that it is not. Carers want to be acknowledged and valued by hospital staff for their particular expertise and knowledge. To work effectively with carers, hospital staff need support from their managers and the board. As Oliver highlights,<sup>2</sup> this work does not happen by itself, it needs to be valued. Currently little attention and time is given to supporting frontline staff in this crucial but subterranean work—a below the surface, unrecognised activity, left to the individual discretion of staff members.

Healthy carer-staff partnerships require shared understandings, proactive communication, and trust. Such partnerships need significant support and resource which short staffed wards are currently ill equipped to provide. Developing this capacity in acute hospitals, as our study has been trying to do, is a challenge,

but it is an initiative that has the potential to provide substantial benefits for patients, carers, staff, and the NHS.

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Competing interests: None declared.

Full response at: [www.bmj.com/content/351/bmj.h6436/rr](http://www.bmj.com/content/351/bmj.h6436/rr).

- 1 Jennings R. Welcoming carers on to the wards: too much pressure for some carers? *BMJ* 2015;351:h6435. (3 December.)
- 2 Oliver D. Author's reply to Jennings. *BMJ* 2015;351:h6436. (3 December.)

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